

American Embassy
Paris
November 23, 1953

Dear Don:

I have for long hesitated to write you on the following subject but finally decided to do so on a purely personal basis.

I understand that you are having a study made of FBO operations. If such is the case, I would like to bring one situation to your attention. The only reason I am venturing into this field is that I have a certain familiarity with it and also strong feelings regarding it as a citizen.

I refer to the American Embassy residence in Paris. I shall try to be as objective as possible. My opinion on the subject does not represent the views of any other Ambassador who has lived at No. 2, Avenue d'Iéna, for to the best of my recollection I have only had casual conversations on this subject with any of them.

Before I came officially to Paris the FBO had bought No. 41, Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré (known as the Maurice de Rothschild house) presumably for occupation as the U. S. Ambassador's residence. I understand that later some argument arose as to whether it had really been purchased with that intention in mind or whether it was destined to be an office building. I have no knowledge other than hearsay of the circumstances attending this acquisition nor whether the price was reasonable. However, in my own estimation if it was bought to serve as an office building a better use of American funds might have been made, to put it mildly.

In the first place, there is a building restriction affecting the height of dwellings on Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré which would prohibit, according to my information, the full utilization of this space for business purposes. Secondly, the present house was designed for residence purposes and is most unsuitable for office use. Thirdly, nothing could be more tactless than to destroy the appearance of the finest stretch of gardens in Paris than by using the space covered by this particular one for the erection of a commercial dwelling.

The Honorable

Donald B. Lourie,

Under Secretary of State for Administration,
Department of State,
Washington 25, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

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Lourie, Donald B.

As you go down the street from 41, Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré to the American Embassy office building on the corner of the Place de la Concorde, you have buildings generally of the same design as No. 41, with gardens of approximately the same size, in the following order: (1) the British Embassy residence, (2) the British Embassy chancery, (3) the Interallied Club, (4) two houses owned by the aged Count Pillywill, and finally, without gardens, our own Embassy office annex and the Embassy itself.

On the other end of the street facing Avenue Gabriel (at the rear of the gardens) there are two houses with small gardens. One is used by the British as an officers' club, the other for art exhibitions. Across from them and extending for a block is the Elysée Palace, the residence of the President of the French Republic. Its present occupant would, I think, bitterly resent such an action as I have mentioned if carried out by the American Government.

The real question, it seems to me, is whether or not our Government should decide (1) to maintain No. 41 in its present form for office use (together with the recreational purposes for which it is occasionally employed such as cocktail parties, dances, moving pictures, and so forth, as well as utilizing the garden for the Ambassador's 4th of July receptions, small military demonstrations, etc.); (2) building over the area with additional office space; and (3) devoting it to the Ambassador's residence.

I am strongly in favor of the last-named, or at least to having a serious study made of the merits or demerits of this choice. When I first saw the building I was not enthusiastic about it and would personally have preferred to remain in No. 2, Avenue d'Iéna until such time as our Government bought another residence. Since then I have changed my mind, after occupancy of 2, Avenue d'Iéna for almost three years and realization that 41 is not well-adapted to any end except as a diplomatic residence.

The American Ambassador in Paris has unfortunately more people to entertain, I believe, than is the case with any of our other Ambassadors or, for that matter, any other Ambassador in the world. No. 2, Avenue d'Iéna was bought by Mr. Myron Herrick with his private funds after he had despaired, during the course of many years of living in rented premises, of inducing the U. S. Government to purchase a residence for its representative. Later the U. S. Government did take it over from him at a price which I think was probably smaller than one could obtain for it if placed on the market today. The building restrictions on Avenue d'Iéna are far less severe than they are on Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. The residence property there is very valuable and could be turned, if some investor desired it, into an apartment house, or else it could be used for some U. S. Government requirement.

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2, Avenue d'Iéna is far from the center of Paris and to get there one must proceed through some of the heaviest traffic in the city. For the American visitors who throng there, it necessitates a long and expensive taxicab drive. As a place for entertainment, it is certainly not worthy of our prestige in comparison with the residences in Paris of many other countries. Moreover, I believe an examination of the records would probably demonstrate that, because of the nature of its construction, which was carried out in the latter part of the 19th Century, the cost of its upkeep has been extremely high. It is a fine house but, on the score of external appearance and internal arrangement, it is excelled by the Embassies of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, Poland, Canada, Holland, Switzerland, and Italy, to mention only a few.

We possess this very fine piece of property at No. 41 which is only a short distance from our office on the Place de la Concorde. It is admirably disposed for the purposes of an Embassy residence and possesses the tremendous advantage of having one of the finest gardens in the world. As U. S. Government property, we will never have to pay any taxes upon it. I should suggest, therefore, that before its final disposition is decided upon a survey should be made to determine whether its cost of upkeep would be appreciably greater than that of 2, Avenue d'Iéna. In the past I believe the FBO people have quoted very high estimates for equipping it with light, heat, plumbing, etc., as an Embassy residence. I have had an office in it for the last nine months and would think that their estimates were perhaps exaggerated.

It does not seem to me that, with smaller powers occupying houses in some instances larger than No. 41, and with the British Ambassador having been established next door to it in a house very similar, but even larger, since 1815, there could be any question about the American Government indulging in ostentation if this were put in shape for an ambassadorial residence. Certainly no one who is familiar with, for instance, the Soviet, Italian or Canadian Embassies would cherish any such feeling.

As regards the French Government and French citizens, it would be a popular thing for us to do. I have always been informed that our acquisition of the property, which everyone assumed would be occupied as a residence, was greeted with relief from the fear that it might be devoted to other uses and mar the character of this street of which the French are so proud.

In connection with such a survey, if you should decide to have it undertaken, I would suggest that Mr. William Adams Delano, who was the architect for the office building on the Place de la Concorde and who was for many years consulting architect for the White House as well as one of the most famous figures in his profession, and Colonel Harris (I am a little unsure of his name), who had charge of the contraction work for the erection of the office building, be consulted.

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As you know, the U. S. Government has access to very large sums of money in francs which could be appropriated to equip and furnish an Embassy residence here.

There are no doubt many arguments pro and con regarding this affair which are worth inquiring into. I presume to call it to your attention on the chance that this has not heretofore been done. I can truthfully say that I have no selfish interest in it of any kind but it is a matter which has seriously engaged my attention as an American citizen and I hope at least that no precipitate action will be taken which would alter the character of this particular neighborhood without full regard having been paid to all the factors in the case.

I believe that Graham Martin is now in Washington. I assume he has a very considerable knowledge of this problem and I think it might be worth-while for you to discuss it with him. I did not have an opportunity to do so myself before his departure but, aside from placing the highest value on his judgment, I know that he has from time to time given considerable thought to the best disposition that might be made of this property.

With best personal regards, I am

Very sincerely yours,

David Bruce

DB:GES